

5870-5874 ATLANTIC AVENUE (COMMERCIAL BUILDING)
Long Beach
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2838
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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- Location: The commercial building located at 5870-5874 Atlantic Avenue, Long Beach, California, housed the Atlantic Theater and from 1946, a structure known as the Hanson Building.
- The Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building faces Atlantic Avenue to the west, and is bounded by 59th Street on the north, Lime Avenue on the east, and South Street on the south. The Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building is situated on the northwest corner of Lots 1 through 5, Block 16 of Tract 6521 (Assessor's ID 7124-032-900). The Atlantic Theater/Hanson building is actually two buildings that were conjoined in 1946.
- 33.861569 N; 118.184822 W. The coordinates were obtained on July 27, 2010, using Google Earth and, it is assumed, North American Datum 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.
- Present Owner and Occupant: Long Beach Redevelopment Agency.
- Present Use: The Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building is unoccupied.
- Significance: The Atlantic Theater, constructed between 1941 and 1942, was designed in the Streamline Moderne style by the prominent Los Angeles architect Carl Boller, Boller Brothers.
- Project information: This architectural recordation project for 5870-5874 Atlantic Avenue (The Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building), was prepared for The City of Long Beach Redevelopment Agency, Long Beach, California. The documentation was undertaken by PCR Services Corporation (PCR), Santa Monica, California. The survey, research, and written documentation was conducted and prepared by PCR historians, Margarita J. Wuellner, Ph.D., Director of Historic Resources, Jon Wilson, M.Arch., Senior Historian, and Amanda Kainer, M.S., Assistant Architectural Historian. The HABS photography was completed by Tavo Olmos, Positive Image Photographic Services, Irvine, California. The project was conducted during December 2009 and January 2010.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The Atlantic Theater was constructed during 1941 and 1942, and the Hanson Building was built during 1945 and 1946.
2. Architects: Carl Heinrich Boller, Boller Brothers, designed the Atlantic Theater. There is no architect of record for the Hanson Building.
3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: The building was constructed for and occupied by the Atlantic

Theater. The theater closed in 1976, and was later converted into the Liberty Baptist Church. The property was used as a church until the mid-2000s. It is unclear when the furniture store in the Hanson Building closed.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The Atlantic Theater was built by Stivers Brothers, and the Hanson Building was constructed by F. D. Chadwick.

5. Original plans and construction: The layout of the Atlantic Theater included an L-shaped plan with an exterior lobby, interior lobby, theater auditorium, back-of-stage area, and second-floor office space and camera room. In 1946, the L-shaped Hanson Building was added to the west side of the property filling in the remaining portion of the property and creating a rectangular building. The first floor of the conjoined Atlantic/Hanson Building includes the exterior and interior lobbies, the theater auditorium, the back-of-stage space, and the ground floor showroom of the Hanson Building. The second floor of the Atlantic Theater housed the camera and film room and office spaces, while the second floor of the Hanson Building appears to have been both offices and storage for inventory.

6. Alterations and additions: The exterior of the Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building has undergone modest alterations. The primary alterations to the exterior of the Atlantic Theater include the replacement or alteration of the original theater marquee in 1977, with a marquee that is both smaller and without the distinctive “Atlantic” signage. The light at the top of the steel tower that rose above the theater is no longer extant. In the exterior lobby a fountain located at the front of the forecourt replaced a freestanding ticket booth. The commercial storefront of the Hanson Building is somewhat altered, including the removal of awnings over the display windows and the removal of stepped fluted pylons which projected above the top of the parapet. The interior of the Atlantic Theatre was altered by the partitioning of the theatre auditorium into support spaces and a stage for the church. Much of the historically related commercial and residential area surrounding the theater has been altered or redeveloped.

B. Historical Context

The Development of North Long Beach¹

The project site is located in the area of Long Beach known as North Long Beach. The area was located within Rancho Cerritos, subdivided in 1887 as the California Colony Tract, a predominantly agricultural area in the early twentieth century. The southern boundary of the subdivision was South Street. The development potential of North Long Beach increased when the Los Angeles Flood District was established during the winter of 1914 to 1915, to address the flooding created from the Dominguez creek, Rio Hondo, and Los Angeles River.

The discovery of oil in 1921 and the construction of a modern harbor between 1925 and 1930 sparked an unprecedented boom in the building industry in Long Beach, including associated residential, commercial and industrial development. The acute demand for housing and the availability of capital resulted in the residential and commercial development of North Long Beach. The Virginia Club relocated from Rancho Los Alamitos to Rancho Los Cerritos in 1921, and as a result, North Long Beach began to attract more prosperous residents. To support the increase in residential density, commercial corridors developed along Atlantic Avenue and American Avenue (now Long Beach Avenue), activity that continued into the late 1940s. The North Long Beach area was annexed to the City of Long Beach in 1923.

The stock market crash in 1929 and the 1933 Long Beach Earthquake had a devastating impact on the built environment, both financial and physical. In 1935, thanks to funding from the federal Works Progress

¹ Historic Context taken from San Buenaventura Research Associates, “Historic Setting,” *North Village Center EIR*, Long Beach, 2007, 3-4.

Administration, parks and transportation facilities as well as civic and recreational buildings in the city were improved. By the eve of World War II, the local economy was sufficiently reinvigorated by the oil and air transportation industries and as a result commercial building accelerated in the vicinity of this North Long Beach thoroughfare. The wartime defense industry served to fully restore it, unlike many Southern California communities, which only truly rebounded in the postwar period. Once again, Long Beach was infused with work, money and people, and crowds came back to the seaside Pike Amusement Park.² By the mid-twentieth century, as illustrated in a Sanborn Map from 1950, Atlantic Avenue had been entirely developed between 59th Street and 56th Street, with rows of one-story commercial buildings, restaurants, furniture stores, a movie theater, a gasoline station, and an automobile service garage.³

Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building

On October 4, 1940, the *Long Beach Argus* newspaper announced a new theater on Atlantic Avenue would be built by a theater operator from Los Angeles for approximately \$100,000.⁴ Two months later, on December 20, 1940, Ivan C. Hanson applied for a permit to construct a theater and two stores.⁵ Mr. Ivan C. Hanson and his wife Eula Hanson were experienced theater operators and also owned the Cairo Theater located on Main Street in Los Angeles.⁶ The theater was designed by the architect Carl Boller of Boller Brothers, an experienced theater design architect located in Los Angeles.

The construction of the theater was delayed due to a shortage of materials and labor. In April 1941, the foundations of the Atlantic Theater were poured. One year later, the Atlantic Theater opened on May 21, 1942, with the most modern features in movie theater design at the time.⁷ The interior of the Atlantic theater was an “ultramodern theme in both exterior and interior design” and the overall theater was “more unique, distinctive and modern, than anything in Long Beach.”⁸ Interior decorative motifs and murals for the theater walls were designed by the firm of Tyler Lindstorm. The designers used innovative backlighting technology to radiate walls colors. The textiles included rich deep red draperies with varied patterned, and Alexander Smith Wilton carpet covering the floors of the lounge, foyer, aisles, stage apron, and steps. The seats were the newest streamlined metal ergonomic air lock chairs and the theater had a Modern R.C.A. magic projection screen. There was a nursery room to accommodate mothers and babies, where mothers could watch the show without disturbing the rest of the audience. The foyer

² Ibid.

³ Sanborn Map Company. Los Angeles, California. Volume 3, Sheet 318.

⁴ *Long Beach Argus*, “New Theater for North Long Beach,” October 14, 1940, 1.

⁵ City of Long Beach Building Department, Building Division, Building Permits. Permit# I-3576, December 12, 1940.

⁶ *Long Beach Argus*, “\$100,000 Theater to be Built on Atlantic,” November 1, 1940, 1.

⁷ *Long Beach Argus*, “Atlantic Theater Opening May 21: Building a Credit to Business District of North Atlantic Avenue,” May 15, 1942, 1.

⁸ *Long Beach Argus*, “Atlantic Theater Opening May 21: Building a Credit to Business District of North Atlantic Avenue,” May 15, 1942, 1.

had neon cover lighting, upholstered seating, a modern candy counter, and a filtered water drinking fountain. The exterior had a seventy-five foot tower with a huge neon lighted ball.

The interior of the Atlantic Theater was modernized between August 1956 and January 1957 under the new ownership of Associated Theaters.⁹ The entire interior was refurnished, repainted, and remodeled. The improvements included new seats, projection equipment, and a new snack bar.

The Hanson Building was constructed during 1945 and 1946. It appears that the Hanson Building was part of the original plans for the theater, but the work was delayed due to shortages in building materials. It is likely that the four-year interval between the construction of the theater and the Hanson Building was caused by World War II, which lasted from December 7, 1941 until September 2, 1945. The Hanson Building was built for commercial purposes.

Carl Heinrich Boller

Carl H. Boller (1868-1946) began his architectural practice in St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1902, designing vaudeville theaters.¹⁰ In 1902, he opened an office in Kansas City, Missouri, and within a year he brought in his brother, Robert Otto (1887-1962), as a draftsman. Robert Boller served in the United States Army Corps of Engineers from 1918 to 1919 afterwards returning to the architectural practice as a full partner. The firm name subsequently changed to Boller Brothers. During the 1920s the construction of movie theaters was booming, so the Boller Brothers opened a new office in Oklahoma in 1920. A year later, Carl Boller moved to Los Angeles to establish an office, while Robert Boller headed the office in Kansas City. Carl Boller continued his Los Angeles architectural practice until his death in California on October 31, 1946.

Boller Brothers designed and consulted on many important theaters and movie houses throughout the Midwest and West Coast between 1902 and 1950. Carl Boller designed the following theaters in California: Inglewood Theater, Los Angeles (1922); Ritz Theater, Long Beach (1924); Largo Theater, Watts (1924); Corona Theater, Corona (1929); Fox Stadium Theater, Los Angeles (ca. 1930); Stadium Theater, Los Angeles (1931); Atlantic Theater, Los Angeles (1941).¹¹

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Constructed from 1941 to 1942, the 11,939 square foot Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building is located on the southeast corner of Atlantic Avenue and 59th Street. The form, architectural details, and materials reflect the influences of the Moderne style, which is evident in the building's vertically scored stepped concrete front wall and parapet, horizontal banding, and curved corner forms. The rectangular building has asymmetrical exterior elevations with a horizontal band and marquee below vertically aligned stucco panels divided by deep scoring. The exterior detailing has high integrity. The theater roof is arched with a wood truss

⁹ *Independent Press Telegram*, "Atlantic Theater Being Modernized," August 12, 1956, B7; *Independent Press Telegram*, "Atlantic Theater Modernized," January 17, 1957.

¹⁰ "Atlantic Theater," <http://www.nlbcentral.com/atlantictheater.html>, accessed December 15, 2009.

¹¹ *Los Angeles Times*, "New Theater Site Picked," February 24, 1930, A5; *Los Angeles Times*, "Theater Work to Start," July 27, 1930, D1; and San Buenaventura Research Associates, *North Village Center EIR*, 5.

while the Hanson building portion of the property has a flat roof with a high parapet. The exterior lobby has decorative patterned terrazzo floors, curved walls, and mirrored glass windows and poster cases. The theater restrooms include some original stalls, water closets, urinals, and lavatories. The interior of the theater auditorium has a gradual rake with theater seats running roughly halfway to the former stage area. Moderne-style diamond-shaped decorative plaster adorns the interior theater auditorium walls. Additions made during the adaptive reuse of the theater into a church include wood frame partitions with gypsum-board surfaces. The new partitioned church spaces include a stage, education rooms, and other rooms used for church-related activities. The new spaces created for church uses are located in the theater auditorium. Theater seats were removed in order to add space for church-space additions.

2. Condition of fabric: The extant, character-defining features are in good condition, and it appears that the building has been regularly maintained over the years.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building is primarily rectangular with overall dimensions of approximately 200' long by 110' wide.

2. Foundations: The Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building sits on a reinforced concrete foundation.

3. Walls: The exterior walls are reinforced concrete frame with brick infill and finished with paint. The exterior walls and parapet of the Atlantic Theater along Atlantic Avenue are vertically scored stepped concrete. The exterior walls of the Hanson building fronting Atlantic Avenue are wood frame with painted stucco walls and a parapet. The north and east elevations of the Hanson Building are poured-in-place concrete.

4. Structural system, framing: The Atlantic Theater's structural system consists of exterior reinforced-concrete frame bearing walls and reinforced-concrete girders and beams.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: There are no porches, stoops, balconies, or bulkheads.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: It appears that the primary entrance doors into both the theater auditorium and commercial space of the Atlantic Theater/ Hanson Building have been removed. There are two primary exterior entrances into the Atlantic Theater portion of the Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building. A pair of gold-painted double metal doors on either side of the exterior lobby is the primary entrances into the theater lobby. There is a wood single door and wood double door on the rear (south) of the theater portion of the building. A doorway on the northwest corner of the theater building leads to an incinerator that was once located outside before the construction of the Hanson Building portion of the property. The primary entrance door into the Hanson Building portion of the building is metal frame. The original glass is missing and the door is covered by plywood on both the inside and outside of the building. Secondary doors into the Hanson Building portion of the building include a single wood door on the south elevation, and a single wood door and roll-up garage door on the east elevation.

b. Windows: There are six mirrored windows with a single fixed glass pane framed with a gold finished metal frame in the exterior lobby of the theater portion of the Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building. There are three double-hung single-pane windows on the rear of the theater portion of the building: two on the second floor and one on the ground floor. There are two boarded fixed windows on the second story of the south elevation of the theater. There is one double-hung, single-pane window in the wall that divides the Atlantic Theater

portion from the Hanson Building portion of the property. The storefront windows along the primary elevation of the Hanson Building fronting Atlantic Avenue are single-pane and run for nearly the entire north elevation and along the first bay of the east elevation. The storefront windows extend from the floor to the height of the entrance door. A row of hopper transom windows run just above the storefront windows and are covered with plywood on the exterior. Recently added secondary windows on east and north elevations are double-hung multi-light windows. There are four windows on the north elevation covered with plywood.

7. Roof: The roof is arched with a wood truss above the Atlantic Theater and is flat with a high parapet on the Hanson Building portion.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: The Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building has two distinct floor plans: the Atlantic Theater portion and the Hanson Building section. Because of their different uses, the floor plans for the two portions of the building are organized differently.

The Atlantic Theater portion is two stories along its south side where the film and camera room were once located. The interior of the theater auditorium is double height with small second story at the north end that once housed the screen and curtain mechanical equipment. The interior of the theater auditorium has a gradual rake with theater seats running roughly halfway to the former stage area. The interior lobby runs north-south with wood doors on the east side leading into the theater auditorium. Two restrooms are located on the east side of the theater lobby just inside the entrance doors. There is a narrow former ticket room, now a closet, entered from the southwest side of the theater lobby. Additions made during the adaptive reuse of the theater into a church include wood frame partitions with gypsum-board surfaces and a baptismal front fountain. The new partitioned spaces include a stage, education rooms, and other rooms used for church-related activities. Also as part of the church adaptive reuse, long narrow hallways run along the edge of the theater on both sides of the theater auditorium. The west partitioned hallway leads from the west side of the lobby to the former back-of-stage area, and along the east side of the theater auditorium a long narrow hallway begins at the church stage addition and runs to the rear of the former back-of-stage area.

The Hanson Building floor plan is largely open although divided into four distinct sections by a thin wood-frame walls covered with gypsum-board. The two south commercial spaces are double height with a wide spanning roof supported by metal tube columns adjacent to the storefront windows. The north and northeast commercial spaces have both a mezzanine and second floor. The north commercial space, which is also the primary entrance space, is largely an open plan with a second-floor loft space on the east side supported by metal tube columns. This second story spans the entire northeast commercial space, which is the only truly two-story space in the Hanson Building.

2. Stairways: There are three stairways in the Atlantic Theater/ Hanson Building. One interior staircase is located within the main theater lobby corridor and leads to the former film and camera room. The stair is constructed with wood-frame treads and risers covered with a layer of thin carpet. The stair begins at the ground floor and rises south to a landing, where it then turns west until it reaches the second floor. A wood handrail is attached to the wall that connects the ground floor to the second floor. The other two stairs in the Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building connect the ground floor of the Hanson Building section of the property to the second floor. Both stairs are wood frame and covered with carpet. The stair in the north commercial space has a wood handrail and an intermediate landing, while the stair in the northeast commercial space has an intermediate landing and no handrail.

3. Flooring: The interior floors of the lobby and sections of the lobby restrooms are composition tile flooring. Portions of the lobby restrooms are terrazzo flooring. An altered section of the theater auditorium has tile flooring,

while the original theater flooring was integrally colored concrete covered with carpet. The second story and rear of the theater have concrete floors with or without thin carpeting. Both the ground and second floor of the Hanson Building portion of the Atlantic Theater/Hanson Building has concrete floors with or without carpet.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The interior walls of the exterior and interior theater lobby, theater auditorium, and restrooms are painted smooth or textured stucco. Closets and back-of-stage spaces are either painted brick infill or unfinished poured-in-place concrete. The theater auditorium has Moderne-style diamond-shaped decorative plaster adorning the interior walls, and a stepped plaster ceiling.

5. Openings

a. Doorways and doors: Doors leading into the interior theater lobby restrooms and the theater auditorium are solid wood panel doors. A wood door with recessed panels divides rooms in the second-story space in the Hanson building section of the property.

b. Windows: There are six mirrored windows with a single fixed glass pane framed with a gold finished metal frame in the exterior lobby of the theater portion of the Atlantic Theater/Hanson building. There are three double-hung single-pane windows on the rear of the theater portion of the building: two on the second floor and one on the ground floor. There are two boarded fixed windows on the second story of the south elevation of the theater. There is one double-hung single-pane window in the wall that divides the Atlantic Theater portion from the Hanson Building portion of the property. The storefront windows along the primary elevation of the Hanson Building fronting Atlantic Avenue are single-pane and run for nearly the entire north elevation and along the first bay of the east elevation. The store front windows extend from the floor to the height of the exterior door. A row of hopper transom windows run just above the storefront windows. Recently added secondary windows on east and north elevations are double-hung, multi-light windows. There are four windows on the north elevation covered with plywood.

6. Decorative features and trim: There is a tile drinking fountain in the southeast corner of the interior lobby. The drinking fountain is recessed into the wall and topped with a triple-height rounded wedding-cake decorative cover with a recessed light. The recessed fountain has large red patterned tile on the vertical surface and smaller red tiles on the fountain step.

7. Hardware: The lobby restroom and auditorium doors retain the majority of their original hardware including hinges, and push plates. The restroom stalls retain some original hardware including hinges, door pulls, and locks. One door in the second story of the Hanson Building portion of the property retains its hinges, crystal doorknobs, throw bolt, and lockset.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: HVAC systems for the building are not operable.

b. Lighting: There is little original lighting in the Atlantic Theater/ Hanson Building, other than some recessed lights and light fixtures in the lobby.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

City of Long Beach Department of Development Services, Building Division, Building Permits.

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B. Likely sources not yet investigated:

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